



NAVAJO NATION OFFICE OF THE
PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT
RUSSELL BEGAYE | JONATHAN NEZ

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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September 1, 2015

PRESIDENT BEGAYE REQUESTS APPOINTMENT OF FEMA DISASTER RECOVERY COORDINATOR

Window Rock – President Russell Begaye has officially requested the appointment of a Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator (FDRC) from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to assist the Navajo Nation as it recovers from the Gold King Mine spill.

“The appointment of an FDRC by FEMA at this stage of the Nation’s response to this toxic chemical spill would greatly benefit the Nation. An FDRC could assist the Nation to effectively assess the short- and long-term impact of the disaster, determine priorities, and activate a recovery support strategy. As the primary, secondary, and tertiary impacts of the toxic chemical spill are already affecting crucial areas of the Nation’s land, waters, crop production, livestock raising, and economic resources, the authority of an FDRC to coordinate assistance from other federal agencies would enable a focus of federal resources and seamless coordination to effectively respond to this disaster,” wrote President Begaye in a letter to FEMA Administrator W. Craig Fugate.

Although the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been appointed as the lead federal agency responding to the disaster, FEMA is best positioned and structured to coordinate all available assistance, long term planning, assessment of impacted communities and developing a recovery support strategy.

President Begaye’s full letter to FEMA Administrator Fugate is below:

William Craig Fugate, Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
500 C Street SW

Washington, DC 20472

RE: Navajo Nation Request of FEMA to Appoint an FDRC

Dear Mr. Fugate:

The Navajo Nation (“the Nation”) respectfully requests the appointment of a Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator (“FDRC”) from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (“FEMA”) to assist the Nation as it responds to the August 5, 2015 toxic chemical spill into the Animas River and which has expanded into Navajo lands. This expansion into Navajo lands via the San Juan River has critically impacted the River and its dependent ecosystems including wildlife, fish populations, and the land base adjacent to the River. The nature of this toxic chemical spill will acutely and chronically impact the River and dependent ecosystem if immediate and effective corrective actions and remedies are not taken. The Navajo Nation Commission on Emergency Management declared the toxic chemical spill a disaster on August 9, 2015, CEM 15-08-09, *see* attached.

The contamination of the San Juan River has affected not only the dependent ecosystem generally but specifically the crops and livestock of the Nation’s farmers and ranchers whose produce support families and communities. The River, when its waters are not contaminated, is critical in providing water resources to wildlife, fish, livestock and crops. Water is also an important element in Navajo traditional Lifeways and ceremonies.

The appointment of an FDRC by FEMA at this stage of the Nation’s response to this toxic chemical spill would greatly benefit the Nation. An FDRC could assist the Nation to effectively assess the short- and long-term impact of the disaster, determine priorities, and activate a recovery support strategy. As the primary, secondary, and tertiary impacts of the toxic chemical spill are already affecting crucial areas of the Nation’s land, waters, crop production, livestock raising, and economic resources, the authority of an FDRC to coordinate assistance from other federal agencies would enable a focus of federal resources and seamless coordination to effectively respond to this disaster. Furthermore, the additional resource of a team of recovery specialists that would accompany the FDRC would enable a simultaneous application of necessary skills and expertise to assist the Nation in effectively responding to this disaster.

For the above reasons, the Nation respectfully requests that FEMA appoint an FDRC to assist us in this time of our great need. Please contact Ms. Roselita Whitehair, who is the Director of the Nation’s Department of Emergency Management.

Sincerely,

Russell Begaye

President, the Navajo Nation

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